

# Ray Mesa Phase I & II Wildland/Urban Interface Projects

## Canyon Country Fire Zone: Moab Field Office

### OVERVIEW

Ray Mesa incorporates two project phases, Phase I began in 2004 and Phase II is ongoing today. Located on the Utah/Colorado border at the southern base of the La Sal Mountains where alluvial slopes adjoin the mesas and unforgiving deep canyons of the Colorado Plateau. The projects are adjacent to the communities of Old La Sal and the Woodlands at La Sal Subdivision and are identified as wildland urban interface high risk priorities. Ray Mesa is also home to some of the last old growth ponderosa stands within the boundaries of the Moab Field Office. The vast expansion of juniper and pinyon woodlands has encroached into the domain of most other native plant species to the extent that the Ray Mesa ecosystem was in jeopardy from catastrophic wildfire. The continuous, dense fuel build up of the woodlands also posed a severe fire hazard to nearby homes on the mesa. The locale is frequented by dry lightning during the monsoon season with a history of high fire occurrence. As a



means to mitigate the potential for high-intensity wildland fire and to reestablish a diverse and fire resilient vegetative community several hazardous fuels reduction treatments were implemented. Pile burning and bullhog treatments have been challenging due to precipitous terrain, deep winter snow and getting proper clearing indices for prescribed burning. Hand pile burning has taken several years but the obstacles were overcome and pile burning was completed in the winter of 2010-2011.

### GOALS

- Reduce the risk of wildfire damage to life and property.
- Reduce stand density in pinyon/juniper.
- Reduce the risk of stand replacement fire.
- Preserve and enhance ponderosa stands.
- Contribute to ecosystem health by increasing perennial grasses and shrubs.

### TREATMENTS

- Thin, Pile & Burn
- Broadcast Burn
- Mastication with Bullhog
- Seeding
- Lop, Scatter and Burn
- Maintenance Burn (Ponderosa Stands)



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### **COLLABORATION**

The Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative (UWRI) has provided funding for the purchase and application of seed over portions of the project area for habitat improvement. Local homeowners, community leaders, Utah Division of Forestry Fire and State Lands and the BLM combined efforts to write a community wildfire protection plan for the La Sal communities. The results of this collaboration helped define specific areas for treatment which were implemented in 2009. The local volunteer fire department has been trained, red-carded and has secured BLM RFA grant money for wildland firefighting equipment. Colorado University has been intrinsically involved with this project for research, project design, monitoring and data collection. The university has ongoing research treatment evaluations that will be shared with the scientific community.

### **ACHIEVEMENTS**

The communities of Old La Sal and the Woodlands at La Sal Subdivision now have an advantage when a wildfire occurs. Firefighters will be able to maintain a safe position and can use the treatment areas to gain a tactical advantage in suppressing a wildfire. The treatment areas of this once dense pinyon/juniper monoculture stand now flourish with diversity of native flora and fauna. Ponderosa pine, oakbrush, sage, native forbs and grasses have an upperhand to compete for space in their environment. Native ponderosa stands are once again open and can return to their appropriate fire regime and condition class. The treatments have increased the herbaceous and shrub component of the ecosystem promoting habitat and forage for wildlife. This unique desert ecosystem, once at risk from the impacts of pinyon/juniper encroachment and wildfire, now has tangible signs of recovery, diversity and resilience.

#### **Ray Mesa Phase I Acres**

- Thin, Pile & Burn-----52
- Mastication -----325
- Broadcast burn -----325
- Complete Treated area-377

#### **Ray Mesa Phase II Acres**

- Thin, Pile & Burn -----484
- Mastication -----883
- Seeding -----124
- Lop & Scatter -----71
- Broadcast Burn -----71
- Research Control-----62
- Planned-----196
- Complete Treated area-1,500



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